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ABSTRACT

As a Department of Defense contractor providing associate degree programs to U.S. service members in Europe, Central Texas College Europe Campus (CTCEC) is currently facing the challenge of becoming a more adaptive institution. The college must contend with an imminent enrollment decline produced by the reduction of U.S. military personnel stationed in Europe by 80,000, as well as by a recent Army policy which limits military tuition funds to only those students taking courses directly related to their military occupation. In order to respond to these changes in its external environment, and ensure the continuity and effectiveness of CTCEC, the campus dean has initiated a strategic planning process, based on Richard L. Alfred's strategic decision process model. The model, designed to facilitate an extensive scanning and analysis of the college's environment, includes the following five stages: (1) "Input," i.e., gathering key institutional and environmental data; (2) "Decision Areas," i.e., defining the mission of the institution and of the strategic plan; (3) "Strategic Planning," i.e., analyzing all information provided in the Input stage; (4) "Implementation," i.e., putting the strategic plan into effect according to a predetermined schedule; and (5) "Evaluation," i.e., designing a system to assess the effectiveness of the implemented plan. Specific areas to be examined when applying the model to CTCEC include the possibility of expanding into foreign and civilian markets; increasing the volume of services provided; increasing tuition; revising CTCEC's military occupational service guide; designing new degree and certificate programs; and creating a transition program for those service members who will be leaving the military. (JMC)

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A MODEL FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR A COMMUNITY COLLEGE THREATENED BY THE CHANGES IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is becoming one of the most essential tasks performed by the postsecondary institutions in the austere nineties. This is especially true of the institutions that provide educational services to the armed forces in the United States and abroad. Faced with the drastically reduced defense budget, troop reductions, and base closing, these colleges and universities are forced to implement drastic measures to ensure survival. One of the institutions planning for its uncertain future is Central Texas College Europe Campus. By implementing a new strategic planning model, the college is attempting to continue its operation by maintaining a sound fiscal base while avoiding a major reduction in personnel and services.

Strategic planning will become more vital in the 1990s as the rapid changes in the environment affect the role and scope of the institutions of higher learning. Shrinking resources will act as a natural catalyst causing less effective institutions to parish. To avoid retrenchment and reduction in scale, institutions of higher learning will have to engage in strategic planning which is seen as a means of aligning the capabilities of the college or university with the opportunities and the demands of the environment. In the 1990s, institutions will have to remain responsive and relevant to the societal and environmental changes to survive.

Planning in higher education evolved in response to the changing environment. The 1950s and the 1960s were the great expansion eras for higher education. Many institutions found it necessary to create plans dealing with enrollment increases, facility expansion, curriculum changes intricate administrative structures and prudent financial allocations.

Different planning techniques originated during this period. Long-range planning, master planning, contingency planning, systematic planning, program planning, program planning and budgeting system (PPBS), and program evaluation review technique (PERT) were among the popular practices.

After the student unrest of the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the country entered the recession of the mid 1970s. Dealing with declining financial resources became a priority for institutions of higher learning. As the outside pressures mounted, management by objectives (MBO), zero-based budgeting and future research became common planning practices.

The adverse financial conditions stretched into the 1980s. Student enrollments did not increase; neither did financial resources. A more comprehensive form of planning was needed in this period of flux, and strategic planning emerged.

The 1990s are expected to be another difficult period for higher education. The fear of declining student enrollments, shrinking financial resources, changing demographics and shifting market economy may prevent institutions from implementing the very measures which will ensure their continuity and effectiveness. It is evident that the laissez-faire management may no longer be effective and that it would need to be replaced by strategic planning.

Strategic planning typically involves issues significantly affected by elements in the organization's external environment. Cope (1987) defines strategic planning as "a pro-active problem solving behavior directed externally at conditions in the environment and a means of finding a favorable competitive position in the continued competition for resources" (p.3).

Peterson (1986) states that strategic planning seeks to establish the fundamental assumptions about the environment, the institution and the future of that relationship. Integrating the two effectively will ensure institutional continuity and satisfy external constituencies.

The primary purpose of strategic planning, according to Richardson and Rhodes (1985), is to ensure the institutional congruence with the environment by developing a viable design for the future of the institution which will facilitate institutional accomplishment. They see leadership as the most crucial component of the process. If support from the chief administrator is lacking, strategic planning will not be successful.

Drucker's (1980) concept of strategic planning includes (1) understanding the environment, (2) defining organizational goals, (3) identifying options, (4) making and implementing decisions and (5) evaluating performance.

Alfred (1985) views the successful community colleges as adaptive organizations that "...function best in a public policy context marked by

dynamic change in economic conditions, demographic trends, technology and social needs. This positioning is predicated on organizational characteristics of flexibility in the decision system, discretionary income for program development and visionary management focused on strategic planning" (p.108).

The Central Texas College Europe Campus is faced with a challenge of becoming a more adaptive organization. As a Department of Defense contractor, providing associate degrees to servicemembers in Europe, the college is threatened by the recent, radical changes in its external environment. The socio-political transitions in Germany and Eastern Europe, along with re-posturing in East-West relations,have impacted on the future status of the American military forces in West Germany and other countries. The proposal to reduce the current force by 80,000 by 1991, limiting the total force to 195,000 in Central Europe, will drastically affect enrollments. It appears that the reductions will be concentrated among the lower rank enlisted personnel with less than ten years of service. This group includes many potential Central Texas College students.

In December 1989 General Crosbie Saint, Commander-in-Chief United States Army Europe (USAREUR), issued a directive concerning the use of military tuition assistance funds for students. Having been instructed by the Department of Defense to reduce USAREUR military education funds by $1 million, General Saint set the funding priorities for the rest of the year. In regards to higher education the policy specifies that military tuition funds will only be made available to students taking courses directly related to their military occupational specialty. This means that military policemen can only be approved to take law enforcement courses while those who work as mechanics can only take automotive courses. Soldiers wishing to use military

tuition assistance funds for courses not related to their jobs are denied the request.

In spite of these unfavorable circumstances, Central Texas College has not experienced a decrease in enrollments this year. As a vocational college with a wide variety of specialized programs, many of its courses can be related to specific military jobs. In some respects, the new policy is having a favorable effect on the college because students from other institutions are being re-directed by the Army Continuing Education Services counselors into programs offered by Central Texas College.

It is evident to the administration of the Central Texas College Europe Campus, however, that the volatile conditions in Europe can cause sudden retrenchment. Strategic planning is seen as a pro-active process for determining future directions which will ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the college in its new environment. Key employees in various levels of the organization have been asked by the Dean of the Europe Campus to submit ideas and plans which may contribute to the formulation of the strategic plan.

The process for strategic planning proposed by Richardson and Rhodes (1985) will be submitted for consideration. It involves seven criteria for designing a strategic plan.

1. Institutional Fit. The strategic plan must be compatible with the institution's existing planning structures and decision making. The new endeavor should be seen as a balance between tradition and innovation which includes change.

2. Short-Term Results. Planning needs to include short-term results in order to keep the commitment of the executive administrators and the involvement of the participants.

3. Purpose. Institutional mission, identity and direction must be established early in the process. Extensive external and internal environmental scanning, improving institutional management, improving communication and raising employee morale must be made a part of the purpose.

4. Scope. If the scope of strategic planning is not adequately defined, there is an inherent danger in trying to accomplish everything and nothing. Intensive pursuit of a few priorities is recommended.

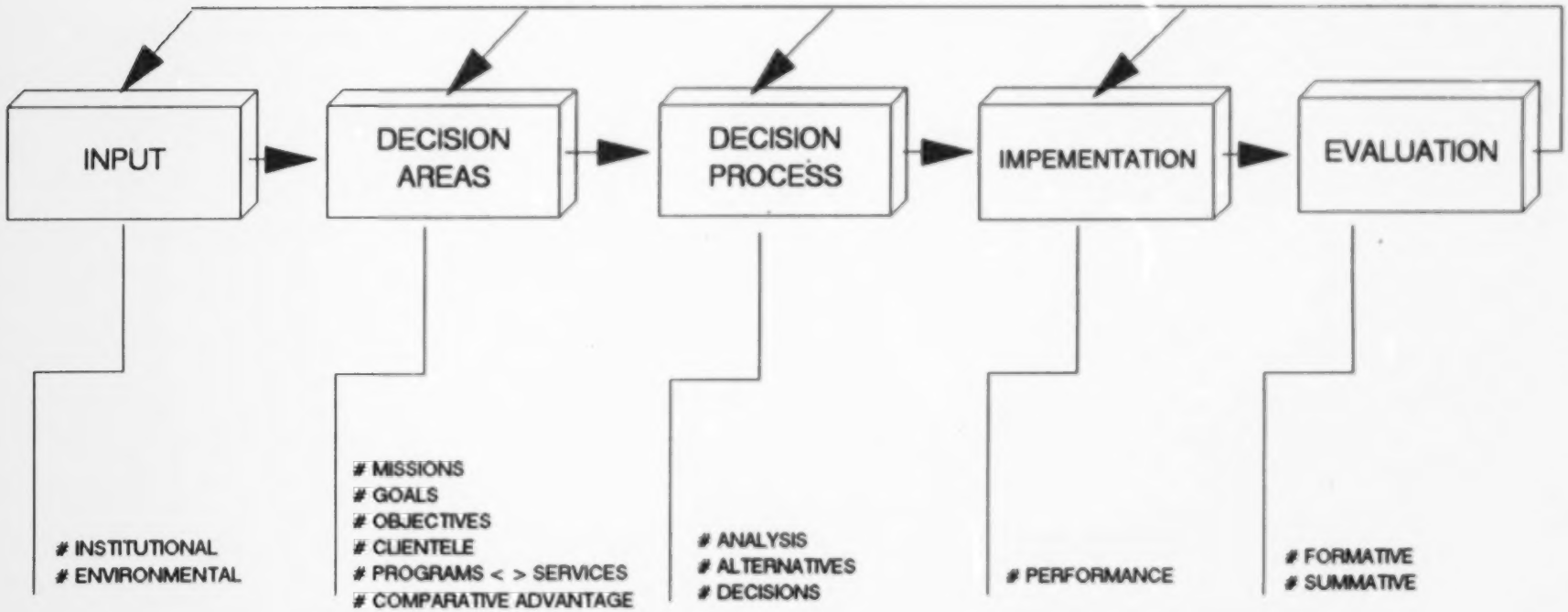
5. Participation. It would seem best to involve as many key personnel in the planning process as possible. Those who are involved in the planning must be made to realize that subjugating the goals of a specific constituency for the benefit of the organization is essential.

6. Resources. Resources must be tied to strategic planning to give the process legitimacy. Inability to do this will reduce the exercise to a series of pronouncements.

7. Leadership. The commitment of the chief executive officer to the process is the single most important element which will contribute to the success of the process. The visible support the leader of the organization gives to the strategic planning effort will give the process legitimacy and boost the morale of the other participants.

The connection between the Central Texas College Europe Campus and its environment will involve extensive scanning and analyses. The strategic decision process will follow the model outlined in Table 1. Some components are based on Alfred's (1990) model while others are those of the author.

STRATEGIC DECISION PROCESS MODEL



1. Input. Information on the various institutional and environmental elements will be gathered. (a) Institutional elements will include people, finances, programs, facilities, image, climate and values. Various methodologies will be employed in gathering the data. For example, information on finances and facilities may be very exact and easily obtainable from the administrative services office. Image, values and climate will likely involve subjective judgements and hypotheses rendering the information comparatively less reliable. (b) Environmental components which will impact on strategic decisions will be economic, social, demographic, technological, political, legal and competitive. Information gathering will involve an extensive outreach effort on the part of the college. A number of questionnaires will have to be generated and personal contacts with individuals and agencies will have to be established in order to determine the needs of the various constituencies. This effort will require a commitment of financial and human resources on the part of the college.

Major sources of environmental information for Central Texas College are the military establishment, the Army Continuing Education Services and the German government. Once the information from these sources is gathered, it will be separated into macro and micro factors. Macro factors are those which have international and national overtones while micro factors are indigenous to the local environment of the institution.

2. Decision Areas. (a) Mission of the institution and the mission of strategic planning must be defined. They will serve as primary guidelines for the process. (b) Goals and objectives will be stated in

terms of desired outcomes and methodologies. (c) Clientele of the institutional services must be identified. (d) Program and services mix which will best serve the needs of the constituencies will have to be defined and prioritized. (e) Comparative advantage rooted in the uniqueness of the institution which gives it a competitive edge must always be considered.

3. Strategic Planning. (a) Strategic analysis of all the information provided in the input stage will be accomplished. (b) Strategic alternatives will be identified. (c) Strategic decisions to include commitment of resources will be formulated.

4. Implementation. The strategic plan will be put into effect according to a pre-determined schedule.

5. Evaluation . An evaluation system will be designed to measure to what degree the established goals and objectives have been met. Formative and summative evaluations will be implemented at this stage of the process.

Additional information regarding specific projects and ideas which may fit into the various stages of the process will be suggested. These represent innovations that have emerged during the year as a result of previous environmental scanning, informal needs assessments and historical data.

1. Foreign Markets. A task force is needed to study the opportunities for expansion in the new united Germany and the Eastern European countries. English language, computer science and management are areas recommended for potential marketing.

2. Current Services. Determine the possibility of increasing the volume of services provided by the college under the current service contracts with the government.

3. Tuition Increase. Review the current budget and establish the feasibility of a tuition increase for next year.

4. New Training. Identify other civilian markets within the military structure which may be interested in having the college provide professional training and management. For example, child development services is currently operated by Department of Defense civilians and some military personnel. Because of reduction in force, the services of this agency, along with some others, will be contracted to outside organizations.

5. Articulation Guide. Revise and update the military occupational specialty guide which aligns the Central Texas College courses with military occupations. Given the present restraints on tuition assistance, the guide will provide an excellent reference for education center counselors and commanders. The college will also have the advantage of being the only institution with such a document.

6. New Programs. Design new degree and certificate programs in diesel mechanics, welding and military science. These have been previously identified as potentials for programmatic expansion.

7. Transition Program. Write a proposal to the Army Continuing Education Services for a transition program for those servicemembers who are leaving the military. The college has several individuals who participated in a similar program offered to veterans at the end of the Vietnam War.

It is hoped that strategic planning will produce some viable alternatives for the Central Texas College Europe Campus which will allow it to continue services in a productive and effective manner. By going through the planning

process, the college administrators should be able to gather important information which will enable them to make better decisions regarding the present and the future of the institution. The Chancellor and the Board of Trustees of Central Texas College will be given the opportunity to analyze the status of the Europe campus based on information which was generated through an orderly process based on factual data and research. Hopefully, the value of strategic planning will be recognized by the executive officers of Central Texas College and it will become a permanent part of the institution's planning process.

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